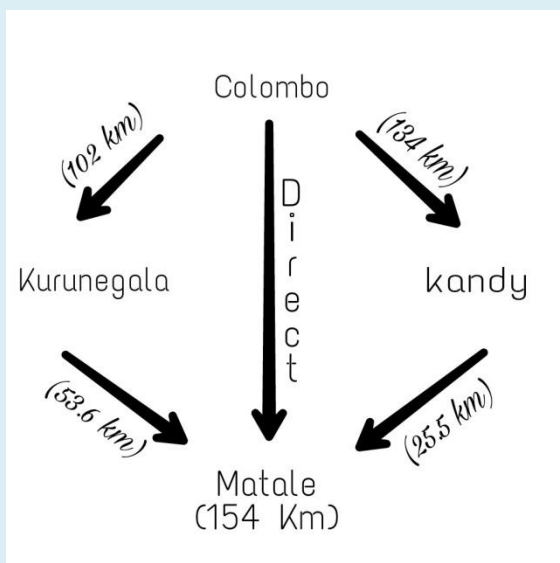


A WANDER TO REMEMBER — MATALE

✓ Before the beginning

My solo Traveling thirst is not yet vanished. I decided to have my next material destination to Matale. Before I search in Google I wasn't aware of the beauty of Matale. I just thought that is only a location in Sri Lanka. I had no good idea about the beauty of Matale until I stepped in. My thought was wrong. I realized this later. I am addicted to travelling now. As a result of my addiction I choose this beauty to taste the mountains and forests all over there. I started my Journey on Jan 05th Friday after my office hours. This was my first Solo Travel on this New Year. Actually I found 3 ways of transport to my destination; I used one of that ways, which was the direct way to Matale. Below chart shows the 3 ways to reach my lovely destination.



I choose Colombo to Matale direct way. I decided this, after arriving to the bus station at Fort Colombo as a result of bus availability. Below link will be useful to find the bus fairs.

http://www.ntc.gov.lk/bus_fare/2017/Paperadeng.pdf

I reached fort C.T.B bus stand by 3.00 pm and enquired about Matale bus from many people around, few asked me to use Kandy bus and take Matale from Kandy or take

Kurunegala bus and take Matale bus from Kurunegala, then I decided to take a direct way, finally I found the correct direct bus within short period of time. Colombo to Matale bus rate was Rs 196.



Solo Travelling Experiences

Bus started moved at 3.40pm. I was sitting near the window side seat with a Muslim gentleman. I was about to say hello, he started talking to me before I start to have the conversation. As usual I introduced myself as a Solo Traveller. Suddenly he started to scold me, saying I am a waste fellow. I wondered why the gentleman was behaved like that. He was a principal in many schools in Colombo. Highly educated person, currently doing his PHD in age of 52. I started explaining myself, why I am travelling, what sort of benefits I gain for my personal and life upliftment, then pulled my articles from my bag and showed him. He read all the pages in an exciting face reaction. At last he understood my traveling benefit for a certain level. He patted my shoulder and said "you are doing a great work, some people waste their money and time for the sake of traveling, but you are different among others. You travel and share it to the world with your experience. Very proud of you son"

He stated that much Muslim community is not doing their education properly because all are money oriented people. He keeps scolding Muslims. After he slept I started seeing the environment. Saw many Pineapple cultivations in Imbulgoda when bus passes in super speed. A girl stepped into the bus at Kadawatha and gave her bag to me as she was standing near our seat. She calls her mother to inform that she was suffering for less money and cannot reach home by the amount available on hand. She asked her father to pick her by near bus stand at Nittambuwa. Me and the gentlemen listened the conversation and he was about to help the girl. Before help her he started talking to the girl but the girl was not responded properly as she was in fear to speak with a stranger. After time passes she stepped down at Nittambuwa bus stand.

The gentlemen said that her father needs to come to Nittambuwa from Warakapola for about 18 km and blame her father. She was a Muslim girl, Parents should give her enough money to travel, and she was a girl, what happens if she misplaced because of less money availability. Actually his thoughts are acceptable. Poverty changes the people. I saw the poverty of that girl and her family background. People really struggle to survive even for bus fairs. Poverty comes as a result of unemployment. People engage in agriculture and cultivations in rural areas but they don't receive fair wages for their hard work. Sri Lankan government should involve in special projects in rural areas rather concentrating on Commercial cities like Colombo.



This is the gentlemen who accompanied me in my travel. As first he refused to take a selfie with me as he said his hair not combed well and he is without his tie. He considered his perfect appearance even for a selfie picture. He doesn't consider about his age gap but he still look for the decency and perfection. Education gives good habits like he has.

I would like to thank one of office colleague who guided me while via mobile text when I travel in the bus, she is Budhdhika. Very humble colleague and gave more advised to travel and cared me by time to time.

I reached Matale by 8.40pm. I got down at Ambagaha Junction halt before the main bus stand of Matale. My host Nafaz came to pick me by his friend's three wheel as I already requested him for 3 days of hosting. He accepts my humble request without any hesitation. We reached his house after 14km of distance via darken forest and mountains. I felt a cool climate; it was a superb climate to enjoy my travel. We were talking about ghosts and snakes stories while we reach home.

Solo Travelling Experiences

✓ Wander beginning

Matale is the largest town of the Matale District of the Central Province, of Sri Lanka. It is 154 kilometres (89 mi) from Colombo and near Kandy. Surrounding the town are the Knuckles Mountain Range, the foothills were called Wiltshire by the British. It is a mainly agricultural area, where tea, rubber, vegetable and spice cultivation dominate.

I wake up early morning around 5am. I didn't sleep last night properly as had an exciting to see the beauty of Matale. I heard beautiful bird singing which was super different than Colombo bird singing. A freshed air breezed on my face when I open the door as first...What a lovely environment. I praised Allah for giving this chance to see this beauty. No richer can get this much of happiness in their life. Nature is the foremost important part in every one's life. Everyone should preserve it for next generation. We could get this sceneries and happiness when we are not allowed to cut trees. Mental illness, stress will be flying off when we start breathing this environment.

I forced my friend Nafaz to come with me for a well bath. I had well bath years back. Want to feel the joy of bathing in the Well. He came without hesitating my kind request. He woke up with me even he feels tired. We both went to his Well and had a good bath together. Felt so freshed. I didn't feel the coldness of the water but I had long hours of bath. Time flies like a rocket.





A view from the Nafaz's home well.

I had the good feeling of his mother as I have seen my mom's fullest character in his mom. She impressed me a lot. I thought no mother will take care their children like my mom cares, but Nafaz's and mom cares him like my mom do for me. I really had a good respect on his mother and his lovely family. I am expecting to be a Son-In-Law in a family like this. I wish I get a lovely family like this.

We went to Matale town and had a superb breakfast. I specially wants to state the taste of meats there, was so tasty of their meats. I had enough meats more than once. Nafaz's friend Auto driver Afridi came to take us to roam the city of Matale. I have already listed the places that I want to see. Afridi helped me to add more places which derives from my list. Very polite and genuine gentlemen he is.



A pic with Driver Afridi and his three wheel at Sembuwaththa Lake.

Solo Travelling Experiences



A pic with my Lovely host friend Nafaz while the way to Riverston



Driver Afridi

Afridi started to drive towards Riverston. Distance between Matale town to Riverston was 31 Km. Roads are very Narrow and too many bends. Road is not in very good condition but can be reached by a car, jeep or three wheel, taking bus is not possible as of the road condition also the bus only travel up to a certain distance, then after we have to walk or take three wheel from there. While we on the way we stopped the vehicle and took some beautiful sceneries. Afridi and Nafaz know where the good sceneries are suit to take photos.



Afridi was very keen and gentle person with expert experience in driving. Every tourist prefers a driver like him. Well knowledge about the Matale and the narrow bend roads. Roads are empty and no human can be seen for 10km per head. We saw granny standing side of the narrow road by keeping chopped mangoes for selling purpose even in the empty forest area, my friend Nafaz stopped the vehicle immediately and reached the granny to buy

Mangoes for the purpose of helping her. I was super surprised by that scene. Was very proud of my friend's good kind helping mind. And also I need to mention about the Mango selling Granny, even in her old age she sell something to earn white colour money to survive without depending on others. A good genuine personality she really has. Everyone should follow the same. We should not be lazy to work hard and earn money. Hard works gives the long-time benefits.

Solo Travelling Experiences



Riverston is one of the main access points to the Knuckles Mountain Range - Sri Lanka. It is the northern entrance to the Knuckles Reserve. There are three main routes to this place. Most common and easiest one is the Matale, Rattota Route. The distance is about 31km from Matale town. You can also reach here from Dambulla or Mahiyanganaya (Dambulla – Mahiyangana road). This road is going through Pallegama. From there you have to take the Illukkubura road.

The super lady I have seen on the way of Riverstone

Riverston is one of the most popular, beautiful and “easy to go” hill tops. Most parts of the year, it is covered with fogs, which is very common at the Knuckles Mountains and the climate is mostly cold and breezy. Vehicles are not allowed here, but you can park them down and have a hike to the top through a pigmy type forest. This area is very rich in bio diversity and having very rare and endemic flora and fauna. Some area of the top is allocated for communication towers and restricted to outsiders. Here, you can experience the wind gap and stunning panoramic views over the beautiful surroundings. Easiest way to climb the top mountain is through the forest, its bit risky but nothing can be received without taking the risk.



We park the vehicle down and have a hike to the top through a pigmy type forest.

Solo Travelling Experiences



Used the short cut way to climb the top hill through the forest.



Pics taken on the hill top of the Riverston mount range



Taken when I try to climb a mini rock to see the full of riverston mount range



Riverstone full view from the top of mini rock

Solo Travelling Experiences

After we seeing the riverston sites we came back to the entrance after few hours of time. We had hot roti with spicy paste and strong hot black tea; it was a suitable food in that climate.



Then we moved the vehicle to Sera Ella road. While we on the way a buffalo tried to attack the three wheel as it was in red colour, buffalos will try to attack red colour things, we should take care ourselves from buffalos there, because a bunch of buffaloes can be see everywhere.





A forest road to the Sera Ella

Solo Travelling Experiences

2. Sera Ella

A very nice location in the knuckles range, the cave behind the fall is a different experience. Roughly 2h drive from Matale town / 1 hour drive from Riverston, through a wonderful forest reserve. Make sure not to disturb the natural environment, you have to descend around 300 m from a very basic staircase with the aid of trees and the effort is worthy. There are several places to bath but be careful if you bath just below the waterfall, it is bit deep and rocky.



Photographs in the Sera Ella

Solo Travelling Experiences

3. Pitawala Pathana

Pitawala Pathana is the other attraction in this area. Some people call this place as the “Heaven on Earth”. You can reach this place by going ahead by the same road (Rattota – Illukkumbura road) to Illukkubura side. It is very unique and large grassland like the Horton Plains National Park - Sri Lanka and covers about 10ha.



However, according to the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), this is a rare type of grassland (Pathana) that cannot be found anywhere else in the country. It also has a great ecological value. Most parts are covered by a grass layer. Isolated and scattered trees and shrubs and rocks also can be found in this area. To enter this part you need to get a ticket form the entrance point.

Solo Travelling Experiences

Mini world's end is the other attraction in this area. This is about 700m distance from the entrance point. It is huge sheer cliff, located in one end of the Pitawala Pathana. View form this place is really amazing.



There are few water streams, which are homes to number of endemic and rare species. Also few waterfalls can be found around this area such as Sera Ella, Bambarakiri Ella, etc.

This is a very sensitive ecological area, which needs to be protected and it is everyone's responsibility to do it. If you go there please "Bring back only memories and pictures. Leave nothing but

footprints".

Solo Travelling Experiences

4. Bambarakiri Ella



There are two water streams and 3 waterfalls. But mostly the main one is visible. The bridge was nice to go above the falls. A nice place to visit as a family and it's advised not to have a bath. Plus beware of not getting too close to the villagers as they try to sell stuff that we don't actually need. Other than that, one of the "Must Go" Place if you are going camping. This fall is set amongst the enchanting evergreen forest of the Knuckles mountain range. A suspension bridge spanning the falls adds the finishing touch to an already beautiful scene. The fall's popularity as a visitor attraction continues despite the fact that up to May 2002, 17 people have been killed while either bathing or attempting to clamber over nearby rocks. Be careful while you are enjoying this breath-taking waterfall. No adventures...no bathing or climbing rocks around the fall for your own safety. But still you want to make a move. Take your own risk.





5. Hulangala



I had a plan to see the sunset from the Hulangala Rock which was located in the selagama at the top hill of the Selagama Tea estate. We plan to reach the rock before 5.50pm before the sunset, but we reach the selagama entrance by 5.45pm where we had to climb the rock for about 15mins. Almost the sun is getting set; we have to reach the place before the sunset colour gets vanished. We ran to the location in a heavy rush, used the shortcut way via tea estates, the routes are very tough and rocky, bushes are sticking to the leg. Had a strong stomach and leg ache. My friend fed up of climbing the hill, he asked me to drop down the activity but I didn't give up, I asked him to climb and run as we came half way, we cannot drop down before we get success, whatever happens we have to go the Hulangala and get success the activity. We run so fast to the top hill again. My friend Nafaz shouted at me to run fast and see the sunset as he cannot run fast, so I ran so fast, he gets dropped down slowly his way. Finally I reached the Hulanagala by 6.05pm, almost the sun settled, I didn't get the expected view but we had a great chance to see wonderful sceneries than we expected. So happy to see that. God filled our eyes and mind in happiness. That was a biggest gift that I have ever got in my travelling experience.

Solo Travelling Experiences



Solo Travelling Experiences

This was our expected view. Nafaz shared with this picture with me when he was visited last. We can see this view when we go to the Hulangala by 5.30pm onwards until sunset.



We came down to the entrance after Hulangala visit by 7pm. It takes 30 mins to climb and get down. The roads are darkening. No people around there. No lights will be there. Needs to take care of ourselves from darkness and from animals. When we are in the location of Hulangala. Traveling alone is bit risky, need a guide to help us. I must thank Nafaz who took the risk and helped me to roam the day. He was with me until the last minutes of the day. He is such a nice and marvellous personality. Thank god for his friendship. Good people are still alive on the earth. Humanity is still alive. Next I must thank Afridi who took me around the expected areas in his vehicle for a fair cost. Nafaz bearded the cost on behalf of myself even I was about to pay in fully.

✓ Wander Conclusion

Next day morning we both wake up earlier than we expected. I packed my bag to say good bye to Matale, which was my last wander day. I had super taste breakfast at Nafaz house made by his Sister. I actually saw my family in his family. I have never thought of calling another one's mother as my mother, but I call his mother as my mother. That was an unexpected scene. Family took care of me as their own child. I was expecting my future wife's family as same as Nafaz family because I have seen a good bond between sister and brother, Mother and Son, this family is similar to my family. I was so happy to spend two days of time there, but expecting to spend my entire life with them by sharing love. I wish I will go to a similar family like this as a son in law. I never had a thought of getting married but after seeing them I thought to have a family like this.

As last day Afridi came to pick us to the Matale town from there we moved to Sembuwatta Lake. Sembuwatta Lake is a tourist attraction situated at Elkaduwa in the Matale District of Sri Lanka, adjacent to the Campbell's Lane Forest Reserve. A paradise like location which is a lake of natural spring water, serves as one of the major attractions of the hill country. It is set amongst the sprawling tea gardens, and reflects the environment at its most magnificent. Towering from the lake are the beautiful green mountains with a thick pines forest where you can take time to climb up.

Solo Travelling Experiences

6. How to get there

It is situated 25 Km away from the Matale city and 30 km away from Kandy. The journey to



there is worth the effort. If you are travelling from Colombo you have to reach Kandy city then take the Kandy-Matale main road. Once you come to the Ukuwela junction, turn right towards to the Elkaduwa road. Then reach the Elkaduwa junction. From Elkaduwa you have to take the Hunugala road. There will be around 3-4km drive on the Hunugala road then

again you have to take the turn to the right which will take you to the beautiful Sembuwaththa Lake.

There is another alternate way that you can reach this place is from Kandy. Go to Waththegama through Katugastota and Madawela. Take the Matale road. After travelling 500 m, get the Elkaduwa road (Hunnas Falls Hotel road) on your right side. From Elkaduwa, travel 2-3 km along Hunugala road. Sembuwatta Lake is a piece of heaven on earth. The road is quite tricky, narrow and for some, dangerous. The best way is Tuk Tuk as you can stop and take scenic views.

Note: The road from Elkaduwa to Sembuaththa Lake is narrow and too many bends. Road is not in very good condition but can be reached by a car, van or three wheeler.



The lake belongs to the Elkaduwa Plantations Ltd. The lake is maintained and kept opened to the visitors by the Cooperative Society of the Elkaduwa State Workers. Therefore, when you enter the lake you will have to pay Rs 200. On the way to the lake you will see the pipe lines which are used to generate electricity to run the factory and a small waterfall where the pipe lines get its water.

Solo Travelling Experiences

Sembuwaththa Lake and Leisure Park is designed in a way to provide a fantastic holiday destination with lots of leisure activities and facilities by the present management. Now you can walk right around it. There are huts where you can eat your meal, watch the sunset, or just relax. Swimming pool with natural spring water is there surrounded by the tea estate. The water is clean because it is continuously been replaced. If you look carefully, you will also see beautiful birds singing on the treetops on the way.



Me and Nafaz getting ready for the cable ride across the Sembuwatta Lake

Solo Travelling Experiences

They are offering overnight reservation of the place and that might be a good experience. Road condition is bad for the last 4 kilometres but can't say worst. They were doing some work to improve the road quality.

7. Nalanda Gedige

From Matale Town 25km towards Dambulla is where you will find the Centre of Sri Lanka. Yes, the centre point of Sri Lanka has been found by the ancient kings and a monument have been made on that location. 27ft below the ground to be exact. Well, it was not done underground, but as time goes on the ground surface is built up higher than what it used to be. But now it has been replaced on the ground surface to protect from the Mahaweli river overflow. From the Matale town at the bus halt near the St. Thomas's College Matale you can get into any bus that goes to Dambulla. Tell the conductor you want to go to Nalanda Gedige and they will drop you there. Be sure to tell the conductor to drop you or remind the conductor on and off to drop you there because it is not a place you can find easily. There are no billboards or any such landmarks or indications to find the place. I can't understand why this is not given much prominence or "show", although it being one of very important sites in Sri Lanka. The Middle point!. The bus ride will take 2 hours or more. It is quite exhausting when you are going and going and the journey seems to never end. I went during the raining season which made the trip even longer and dreadful. Make sure that when you get into the bus sits in a comfortable place. Don't offer your seat to anyone who claims to need it. You are going to need the seat too! There are plenty of Dambulla buses starting from Matale so; you can be choosy in the seat matter.



Wrong spelling for the Nalanda Gedige in Tamil. I wonder why was they misspelled.

Solo Travelling Experiences

When you get down you will be on the opposite side of the road, so will have to cross the road to the other side where there will be a few boutique shops & three wheelers [tuktuk]. Take a three-wheeler or walk, the best way to get tuk tuk because there is about another 1.5 km or so down a by road that you, but me and Nafaz walked until we reach the location about 1.5 km. The location is very sunny, better to wear hat when we are in that area. You can see Tube wells are in the right side of your way, if you are thirsty we can pump water and suitable to drink and wash our faces.



The place is well maintained, clean for an archaeological site that is not given much promo. At first just at the parking lot there is a small museum. There you will see parts excavated from the original site. Pieces from the original monument, pillars, parts of the walls etc. There are plenty to read about the monument too. You will get much information at this small museum. There are staffs if you want to know more about the history. Make sure you go back to this museum even after you visit the main site. Because then some of these artifacts will make more sense.

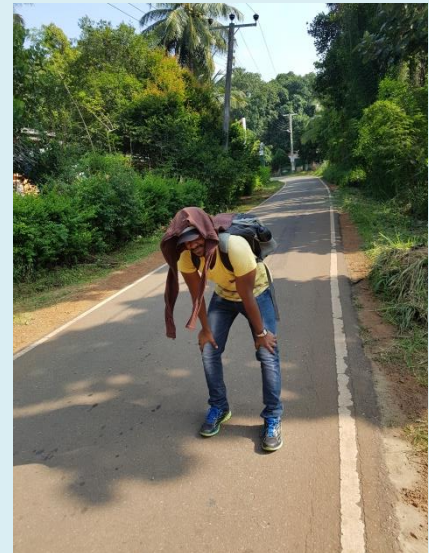
Then on the other-side of the parking, is the main entrance of Nalanda Gedige. It is still placed as how it was in the old days just that turned into ruins. One can imagine how this long corridor must have been like in the ancient times with all its majesty. Walking down the entrance corridor, you start to see the main monument of Nalanda Gedige.

It is an absolutely fascinating site! You will lose yourself in a half a moment not being sure whether you are visiting a site in India or Sri Lanka. Because the monument is very close to what you will find in India. After seeing all Buddhist temples in Sri Lanka, seeing an ancient monument that looks like a Hindu Kovil is a little surprising. What's more surprising would be that this Hindu temple looking structure is in fact made as a Buddhist shrine room! And this whole site is actually made as a temple. There is a ruined Sthupa on one side and where a Bo tree was on another side and this rock shrine house which inside you still find a rock carved statue of Lord Buddha. Very interesting side of Sri Lankan history indeed.





So it seems that, the structure of this Buddhist shrine room reflects South Indian Pallava architectural features. Consists of inner sanctum, middle area and pavilion. These 3 features usually seen in Hindu temples. The reef is supposed to be having been built in the 8th century in an architectural structure of a gedige. The monument with its structural designs has signs of influences of Mahayana Buddhism (Sri Lanka is a country of Teravada Buddhism).



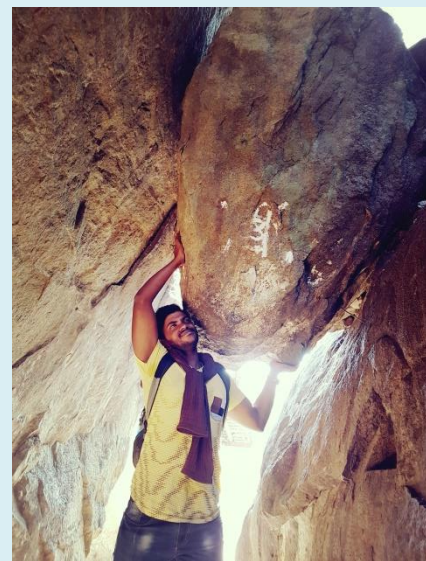
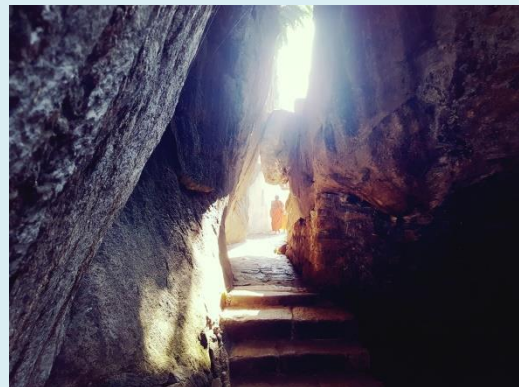
8. Aluviharaya

The Aloka Vihara (Aluviharaya) has much folklore regarding its name, one is that the Pali word Aloka was Alu (light) in ancient Sinhala and as it was the abode of Theras, it was called as Viharaya. And these two words together (Alu+Viharaya) made the word Aluviharaya. From Nalanda gedige we took the Matale bus and travelled for 22 km to reach the Aluviharaya where we have to cross the road and get into the Temple entrance by removing hats on the head.



Solo Travelling Experiences

The history of Aluvihare Rock Temple is traced back to the 3rd Century B.C to the reign of King Devanampiyatissa. It is believed that the King built the dagoba, planted the Bo sapling and founded the temple after the introduction of Buddhism to the country during his reign. Aluvihare Rock Temple was the historic location where the Pāli Canon was first written down completely in text on Ola (palm) leaves. Many monastery caves, some of which exhibit frescoes are situated near this temple.



Solo Travelling Experiences







9. Sri Muththumari Amman Kovil



A beautiful temple, said to have been built around 1850, by Nattukottai Chettiars of Karaikudi, India. Well maintained temple. Temple with all shrines beautifully decorated and illuminated is a treat to watch. Located in the center of the city of Matale, one can reach it very easily; lot of parking space is available. Inside the temple towards the right hand side, look up and you will see an open roof portion that shows you the rise of the outside monument set against the gaudy interior colour of

inside. It's quite a remarkable sight (no photos allowed inside though). On display are numerous shrines to Hindu deities, Good atmosphere inside, and the architecture outside is incredible. I was very taken with this temple, would definitely recommend a quick visit. Here is an entrance fee now (250LKR per foreigner). This is the second largest Hindu temple on Sri Lanka, only bested by the one in Jaffna. While walking the premisses is certainly rewarding, with many detailed deities on display and the 100ft tall spine.



I really miss Matale when I ready to come back Colombo. I felt so blank with my friend Nafaz too. I recommend using private or C.T.B buses to travel as the intercity (AC) buses are very short to and you will get the pain of back and shoulders soon.